

THESE



ARE



MY



HEROES





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**By:
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**Almighty and everlasting God, merciful Father,
since Thou hast today adopted as Thy children these Thy servants,
grant, we implore Thee,
that strengthened by the Holy Spirit and nourished by the Bread of Heaven,
they may grow to full maturity in Christ. And may they always
keep in mind their patron saints, so that by imitating them,
they may attain to the eternal home of the Father.**

Amen.

(Prayer from the Ritual for Administration of the Sacrament of Baptism.)

The saints of God—these are my heroes. They lived in different countries and different times; one was a king and one a lawyer, one a bishop and one a priest, and one founded a religious order; but something they all had in common was a great love for God.

Their names—Edward, Francis, Andrew, Thomas, and John—are the names boys still use today. They are the names taken also at Confirmation. Therefore, these saints are not only our heroes but also our patrons. By reading about these saints, we can learn something from their lives to make our own lives more what God wants them to be.

A SAINT WHO WAS A KING

Saint Edward (1003 - 1066)

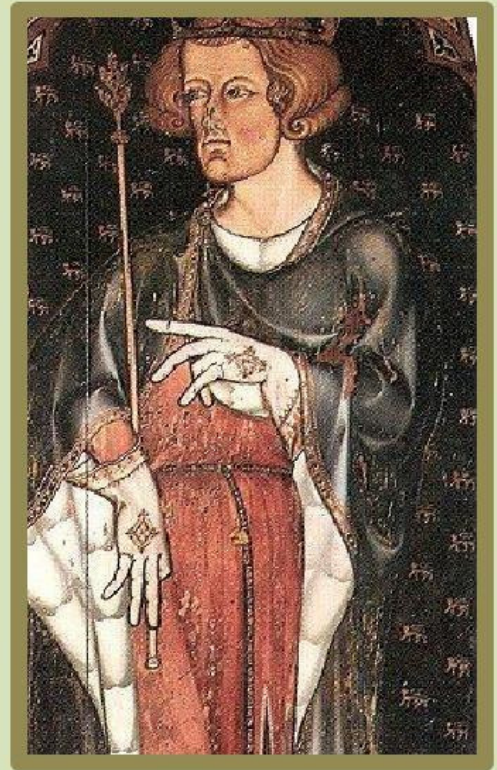
Saint Edward was born almost at the beginning of a new century, in the year 1003. Although he lived so long ago, he is still remembered as one of the best kings England has ever had. Many of the wise laws he made remain to the present day. He was called Edward the Peacemaker, and if ever the world needed a true peacemaker, it needs one today. What, then, can this saint and hero teach us?

When Edward was a little boy, England was in a state of war and unrest. The Danish King, Canute, ruled England at that time and sent Edward and his brother Alfred, the rightful heirs to the throne, to Normandy, France. Edward grew up in Normandy, leading a quiet and peaceful life. He was very fond of hunting and hawking, but, at the same time, he liked to spend much of his time at prayer, alone with God. Once during his prayer, he made a vow, a very solemn promise, to make a pilgrimage to Saint Peter's tomb in Rome if it were God's Will to restore him to the English throne.

In the year 1042, the people of England sent to Edward to ask him to be their King. He agreed to this, although he knew it would be no easy task to rule a country that had been torn by many wars and unjust laws. He said to one of his friends, "I would not accept the greatest of monarchies if it were to cost the blood of a single man."

Edward returned to England and was crowned King on Easter Sunday in 1042. He was forty, very handsome to look at, and very gentle in manner. Many people thought he would be too easygoing. After a few years, another Danish king, Magnus, declared he would like to be King of England and prepared to send Edward away again.

King Edward very firmly replied, "I sit on the throne as the descendant of the English monarchs and I have been called to it by the free choice of the English people. Let



Magnus come! I will raise no army against him; but he will never mount the throne of England until he has taken the life of Edward.”

The people were delighted with such an answer, and England entered into a period of peace and prosperity such as it had not known for a long time. King Edward was kind and charitable to his people, particularly the poor. He freed them from an unjust tax they had paid to the Danes, and no further taxes were imposed upon them. Someone has written this great praise about him, “Those in trouble were not afraid to ask his help. He always welcomed those who came to see him.” It is not always easy to welcome visitors, but Edward managed to do it.

The King now remembered his vow to go to Rome, but the people were so afraid, if he left the country, the peace of the land might be broken again, that they begged him not to go. Edward pointed out that he must keep his vow, but he was moved by the fear of his people. He wrote to the Pope to ask him what he should do.

The Pope understood how matters were in England. He freed King Edward from his vow and told him instead to give to the poor anything that he had collected for his journey, and also to build a church dedicated to Saint Peter to make up for the wonderful Saint Peter’s in Rome that he was never to see.

One thing about the saints—they always obey. Edward immediately set about putting aside money for the church he was to build and, finally, it was completed. It is known today as Westminster Abbey and it was here that, later on, the King was to be buried.

In the year 1065, Edward went to London to be present at the beautiful ceremony to dedicate the church he had built. As so often happens, he was not to witness the crowning glory to his work. He became very ill on Christmas Eve, yet he practiced his usual self-control by appearing as cheerful as ever and carrying on with his ordinary duties. He asked his wife, Queen Edith, to see to the proper decoration of the church for the Consecration ceremony. Despite all his efforts, Edward was too ill to be present on the great day. His work for God and his people was almost over. He died on January 5th, 1066. His feast is on October 13th, the day when Saint Thomas a Becket removed Saint Edward’s body from its first burial place to the shrine in the Abbey where it still rests.

Several lessons can be learned from the life of Saint Edward, but perhaps two stand above the rest. The first is his great love for peace, a peace that he always had within his own soul, and that he won for his country. No wars, no arguments, no conferences were used to obtain this peace; his every-day good example and peaceful living among his own people were the weapons of victory.

The second lesson is his faithful fulfilling of God's Will. King Edward knew that to be a saint he must do God's Will. For him, the Will of God meant he must try at all times to do what he knew to be right for his country, his people, and himself.

Saint Edward, the Peacemaker, who always tried to do the Will of God, is a wonderful hero and patron for anyone.

A SAINT WHO FOUNDED A RELIGIOUS ORDER

Saint Francis of Assisi (1182 - 1226)

The streets of Assisi were bathed with sunlight. Down them rode Francis Bernardone, a smile on his lips, a song in his heart. Francis was young and happy, the leader of the young men of his city. He had wonderful dreams of winning honor and glory in the wars that were always being fought between the Italian cities of his day.

Francis was the son of Peter and Pica Bernardone. He was born in Assisi in 1182. Peter Bernardone was a wealthy and well-respected citizen. His son, therefore, was given a good education and took his place as unquestioned leader among the young people of his city.

Nothing disturbed the carefree and happy life of Francis until he was twenty. At that time, Assisi and the neighboring territory of Perugia declared war and Francis's heart leapt high. Here was



his chance at last! Riding his noble horse and dressed in splendid clothing, Francis rode gaily to the war. Alas for his dreams! The Assisians were defeated and Francis was taken prisoner. Even prison could not dampen the joy he always felt. His fellow-prisoners said, "You are mad to be merry in prison."

Francis just smiled at them. At the same time, he became more thoughtful, and he could not help wondering about the life he had been leading. Perhaps God wanted more of him than an empty, carefree life. At length the prisoners were set free, and Francis returned to Assisi. His friends noticed that although he was always cheerful he was much quieter than before, and Francis himself found no satisfaction in his old pleasures.

He prayed and waited. One day he made a visit to the Church of Saint Damian, outside Assisi and, as he knelt before the Crucifix, a voice seemed to come from the figure of Christ on the Cross. "Go and repair My Church for Me." Francis was very astonished. In a trembling voice, he replied, "Gladly will I do it, dear Lord."

Our Lord meant for Francis to help restore His Church to spiritual fervor, but the eager young man noticed that Saint Damian's was falling to ruins and immediately set about rebuilding it. His father was angry with him and finally disowned him. Francis cried out that in the future he would have no father but God in Heaven.

Francis lived as a hermit for some time, wearing a tunic of rough sacking tied round his waist with a cord. He wanted to be very poor for the sake of Our Lord, Who sometimes had not even a pillow on which to lay His head. Yet Francis was not by himself for long. Just as companions had gathered round him when he was rich, so they came to him now that he was poor, but this time for a different reason. They wanted Francis to teach them to love God as he did and to share his life of prayer and poverty. Although Francis did not realize it, this was the beginning of the great Franciscan Order, because as the years went on many other followers walked in the way led by Francis. Priests, brothers, nuns, men and women in the world all claimed Francis of Assisi as their spiritual father.

So many happenings were crowded in the life of Francis that all could not possibly be told here, but some events stand out from the rest. Francis was very happy when Pope Honorius III gave his approval for the Franciscan Order. In thanksgiving, Francis decided to celebrate Christmas in a very special way. He went with some of his friars to a little country place called Greccio, where the Pope had given them permission to offer

Midnight Mass in the open. An altar was erected. To stand beside it, Francis made a little Crib like the ones seen churches today at Christmas. However, there was something different about this Crib, because it was the first one ever made to commemorate the birth of Our Lord at Bethlehem long ago.

The people came in great numbers to the Midnight Mass and they gazed with delight at the Crib. Francis himself knelt at the side of the altar. He was not a priest, only a deacon, because he had such great reverence for the priesthood that he would not be ordained. He would kneel and kiss the ground where a priest had walked. When the priest came to the Elevation of the Mass, Francis looked up at the Sacred Host and saw for a minute the Holy Child from the Crib smiling at him and holding out His arms.

Another time Francis, like Our Lord before him, went up the mountain, Alverna, to pray and to be alone so he could be more united to God. Francis had always had a great love for the Passion of Our Lord. Perhaps as a reward for this devotion, Francis was now signed with the marks of the Stigmata—the wounds of Christ in his own human body. When Francis had finished his prayer, he noticed his hands and feet, and he felt a burning fire near his heart. In all these places were the glowing wounds that Our Lord had first received on Calvary, and which Francis was to carry until his death. No wonder he would often exclaim, “My Love is crucified.”

Francis died only two years after this. He was not an old man, only forty-four years of age, but he was worn out from his work and love for God. When he knew that his last moments had come, he asked his brother Franciscans who had gathered round him to lift him out of bed and rest him on the bare ground so he might die as he had lived, a poor man for the love of God. Saint Francis of Assisi was canonized by Pope Gregory IX only two years after his death. His feast is on October 4th.

Like all the saints, Francis can teach us many lessons, but two may be singled out: his great love and respect for priests and his devotion to the sufferings and death of Christ. Saint Francis of Assisi, teaches us to revere Our Lord in His priests and to love Our Lord in His Sacred Passion.

A SAINT WHO WAS A BISHOP

Saint Andrew Corsini (1301 - 1375)

Nicholas and Gemma Corsini were very sad because they had no children. They prayed for many years for a child and promised, if their prayers were heard, they would offer the little one in a special way to God through Our Blessed Lady.

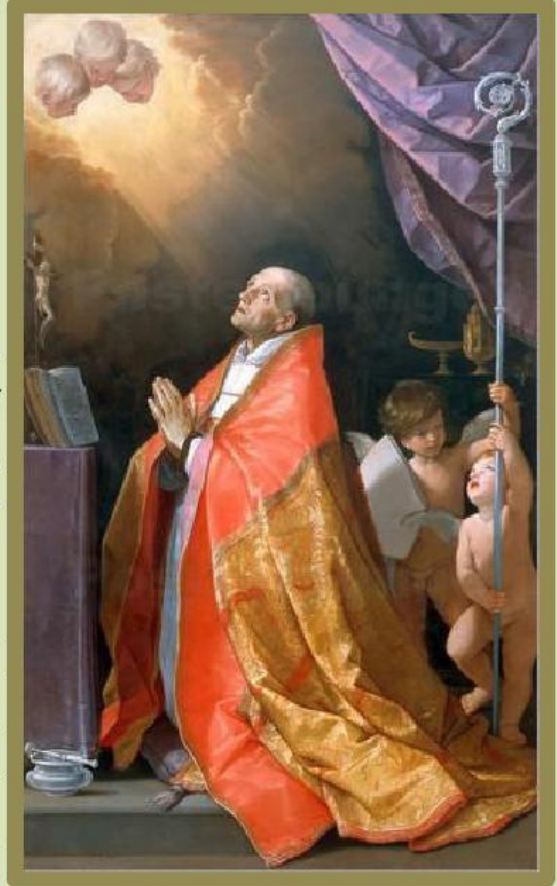
Gemma had a strange dream before their prayers were answered. She thought she saw a savage wolf running to the church. She followed it and then, after waiting for a while, she noticed it slowly changed to a gentle lamb.

On 30 November 1301, the feast of Saint Andrew, Nicholas, and Gemma were able to thank God for having sent them a beautiful baby boy whom they named Andrew after the Apostle. Little Andrew belonged to a rich and noble family and his parents sent him to the best schools where he always did

well because he was very clever. As he grew older, he noticed how the other rich people lived and he wanted to be like them. The world seemed a wonderful place to the young boy. He wanted his own horses and dogs and, more than anything else, he wanted a gun because, in those days, people were always fighting between themselves and Andrew thought it would be great if perhaps he could kill some of his enemies. As time went by, he became more worldly than ever. He would not obey his mother and father and laughed at them if they tried to correct him.

One day, when he had spoken very rudely to his mother, she answered him sternly, “I think, my son, that you must be the wolf I saw in my dream.”

She had never spoken about the dream before so Andrew was surprised at his mother’s words. He asked her to explain them. “Tell me, mother, what do you mean,” he said.



“Listen carefully to what I am going to say,” answered his mother, and she told him all about the wolf that had changed to a lamb and how, because of her promise before he was born, Andrew really belonged more to Our Blessed Lady than to his own parents.

Poor Andrew! He was only fifteen and very upset to think of all the sorrow he had brought to his good mother and father, so he turned to Our Lady and begged her and the Divine Child to help him behave as a lamb in the future and not like a wild wolf.

The next morning Andrew went to the Carmelite Church and repeated his prayer in front of Our Lady’s altar. When he rose from his knees, he went straight to Father Jerome, the Provincial of the Carmelites. He knelt down before him and asked very earnestly to be received as a postulant in the Order.

Father Jerome, of course, was much surprised to see the worldly Andrew Corsini before him, and still more surprised to hear his request. He spoke kindly to the boy, but would not give him an answer immediately.

When Andrew left him, Father Jerome went quickly to the boy’s parents to tell them what had happened. Nicholas and Gemma were filled with joy, and told the priest that if their son could be a Carmelite their dearest wish would come true. Very soon, even though he was so young, Andrew was given the brown habit of the Carmelite Order and, from that time, he tried to live as a saint would live.

In the monastery, the Fathers remembered the wild life their new novice had once led and how rich he had been. So, they decided to test him. He was given the hardest and humblest work. Those who had once been his friends out in the world laughed at all he had to do now. Andrew took no notice of them and tried his best (even though it was not always easy) to be faithful to his daily duties for the love of God and Our Lady.

Soon it was time for Andrew to be ordained a priest and to offer his first holy Mass. This is a wonderful day in the life of any priest. It was particularly so for Andrew, because after Communion Our Lady appeared to him and said, “You are my servant, I have chosen you, and wilt be glorified in you.”

Father Andrew, who was so good at his schoolwork when he was a boy, was now sent to the University of Paris, because when God makes a person clever it is good to use that cleverness for Him. Father Andrew wrote books, too, and he loved to explain the meaning of the writings of the Bible.

He was so wise and good that later he was made Prior of the Carmelites in Florence, a beautiful Italian city, then Provincial of all Tuscany. Finally, he was appointed Bishop of Fiesole. It was while he was Bishop that Andrew Corsini, who had once been a little boy longing to fight with a gun, became known as the peacemaker because he tried so tirelessly to get people to live at peace with one another.

One Christmas when Bishop Andrew was offering Midnight Mass in the Cathedral at Fiesole, Our Lady appeared to him again. This time she came to tell him that he who had so faithfully served her on earth would soon be with her Divine Son forever in Heaven. The holy Carmelite was overjoyed to hear the news and immediately began preparing for his death.

On 6 January 1375, the Feast of the Epiphany, just as Our Lady had said, Saint Andrew Corsini died very peacefully with this prayer on his lips, “Now dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, in peace.” After his death, many miracles were worked when people prayed to him and Pope Urban VIII canonized him as a saint. His feast is on February 4th.

People with bad tempers can learn from Saint Andrew that, with grace and perseverance, it is possible to overcome their anger and impatience. They can also imitate him in his great devotion to Our Blessed Lady.

A SAINT WHO WAS A LAWYER

Saint Thomas More (1478 - 1535)

In the days when England was still completely Catholic, there lived in London a little boy who showed by his life that people can live in the world as ordinary lay-folk, yet become saints just as much as Popes and bishops, hermits and nuns.

Thomas More was born on 7 February 1478. He grew up with his three sisters and one brother in a good Catholic household. When he was quite young, his father saw that this son of his was going to be very clever. Thomas also knew he was clever, but he realized that his cleverness was a gift from God, so he studied very earnestly to make good use of the talents God had given him.



He knew, however, what a great saint had once said, that “prayer without study is presumption; study without prayer infidelity.” Therefore, his duty to God always came first. While he learned all he could about literature, science, and music, all his studies were based on a foundation of deep and true piety. Life at Oxford University in the days of Thomas More did not always help a student towards a faithful practice of his religion. Yet, young Thomas received Holy Communion frequently and, later served as altar boy.

After Thomas left Oxford, he continued his studies at Lincoln’s Inn because his father wanted him to be a lawyer. Young men studied law at Lincoln’s Inn. Yet, Thomas was not quite certain of his future. He was certainly very keen about law but, like many other young men, he wondered if God might be calling him to be a priest. To find out, he went to live with the Carthusian Monks at their Monastery, which is called a Charterhouse, in London. He stayed there for four years, yet, not as a monk, just as a layman--working, praying and studying, and asking God all the time to make His Will known.

Finally, Thomas was convinced he should return to the world and, although he loved the life of a monk, he was quite determined that he was meant to serve God faithfully and loyally as a lawyer and father of a family. When he was twenty-six, he was made a Member of Parliament and the next year he married.

That More household was a very happy place. He loved his wife and children and, together, they assisted at Holy Mass before the work of the day commenced. Sir Thomas More spent as much time as he could spare from the affairs of state with his family, helping the children with their lessons, taking part in their games, and sharing their childish joys and sorrows. People loved to visit the Mores because they were always so contented and happy together. At the close of the day, they would all gather round Sir Thomas as he led the family prayers.

The old King had died and the new King of England was Henry VIII. He was very fond of Thomas More and was not happy until he had the young lawyer near him at the Royal Court. King Henry raised Thomas to the highest office in the land by creating him Lord Chancellor of England. He had come a long way from the little boy at Oxford. Now he was at the peak of fame, loved and honored by the King, respected by all who knew him, with wealth and a beautiful home and his loving wife and children.

But, the Lord Chancellor was to be tested and, in the testing, he showed that he was still the same Thomas More who was determined to put loyalty to God and his conscience before any other loyalties. Henry VIII wanted to marry again while his wife, Queen Catherine, was still living. Of course, not even the Pope could give Henry permission to do this. The King was so angry that he would no longer obey the Pope, but set himself up as head of the Church in England.

To make his position quite clear, Henry called on his subjects to take an oath declaring him to be head of the Church. He was particularly anxious for Sir Thomas More to take this oath, because the Lord Chancellor was so respected by everyone. Sir Thomas had gone to London with his son-in-law to hear Mass at Saint Paul's and, while he was there, he was summoned to take the new oath. He returned home to prepare for this ordeal. He went to Mass and received Holy Communion, as he always did before any serious event. Then he said goodbye to his dear family, and took a last look at his happy home.

Sir Thomas refused to take the oath! The king and his court were astounded. They pointed out that others had taken it, people who were considered very good Catholics, even Bishops and priests; but the Lord Chancellor remained firm.

He said others must look to their own consciences but he could not make a decision that would cause danger to his immortal soul and he firmly believed that, in spiritual matters, the Pope alone was Head of the Church.

Thomas More was imprisoned in the Tower of London where, the entire time, he prepared himself for the death he knew would come. In prison, just as at home, he was cheerful and contented and tried to make others happy. Finally, on 6 July 1535, he was beheaded, a brave martyr who died because of his loyalty to the Pope and the Church.

What are some of the lessons we can learn from the life of Saint Thomas More? One lesson would be that we should pray earnestly about our vocation in life, asking God to show us what He wants us to do just as Saint Thomas did. We can also imitate Saint Thomas More in his devotion to the Pope. We should pray often for the Holy Father in these troubled times.

The feast of Saint Thomas More is on July 6.

A SAINT WHO WAS A PARISH PRIEST

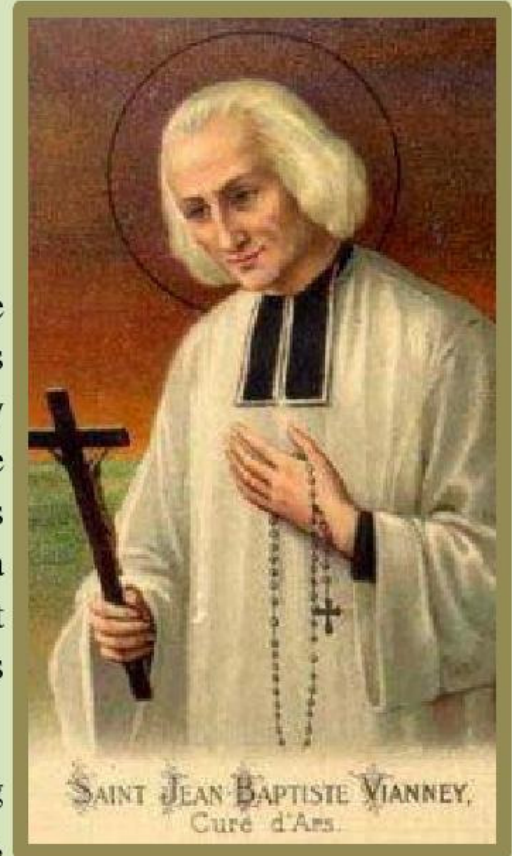
Saint John Vianney (1786-1859)

Monsieur and Madame Vianney lived in Dardilly, France. Dardilly was a small village. The Vianneys were farmers with three sons when, in 1786, another little boy was born to them. They called the baby John Baptist.

John was only three when the French Revolution broke out. The churches were closed, the Angelus bell was silenced, priests were declared traitors, and, if they were caught, they were cruelly put to death by the guillotine. This meant that, while young John was growing up, Mass could only be offered secretly in a barn, in a quiet cave, or in some other hidden place. It was not until he was ten that he was able to receive his First Holy Communion.

Everyone thought John Vianney was a very dull young man. They called him a clumsy, uncouth ploughboy, even though they all agreed that he was very holy. When he was nineteen, he astonished his people by telling them he wanted to be a priest and he went to live with a good priest named Father Bahley. Father Bahley tried to educate John for the priesthood. It was hard work and John himself realized it. He decided there were two things he *could* do, and these he did. He prayed and did acts of mortification.

In the meantime, Napoleon was in power in France, and ordered all young men to be called up for the army. John had to go but he suddenly became ill and was taken to the hospital. When he recovered, he tried to catch up with his regiment, but he was too tired and exhausted to reach it. Instead, he found shelter with a kind man for whom he did odd jobs about the house. One of his young brothers eventually took his place in the army, which freed John to enter a seminary to continue his studies for the priesthood.



Here was the same old story. John Vianney just could not learn Latin or theology. He failed his examinations and was sent home. Good Father Bahley came to the rescue again and he kept persevering in the teaching of his slow pupil until, at long last, John was ordained a priest. After three years, Father Vianney was sent to the little village of Ars to be Parish Priest. Those in authority believed Ars did not need a clever, popular priest, and they were right. What Ars actually needed was a Parish Priest who was a saint--and Father John Vianney was that saint!

The people of Ars were kind and friendly but were very careless in their spiritual duties. They liked their priest, but they were not going to be bothered listening to his sermons (if he could preach at all!) or going to him to Confession (if he knew anything about forgiving sins!).

As before, Father Vianney prayed and did penance and, gradually, without anyone noticing it, Ars was a different place. The people went to Mass *and* the Sacraments; they flocked to Father Vianney's confessional. They preferred to confess to him than to any other priest in France; they listened eagerly to his sermons because they found that his speaking of simple words and his repeating of old truths over and over again helped the most. Soon, the rich and the poor--men, women, and children--came crowding into Ars to go to Confession to its holy priest, Father John Vianney. The Father John Vianney, who had failed his examinations. Father John Vianney, whom everyone thought was dull and lazy. Ars could not hold all the people, and still they came. Father Vianney, they had heard, was a saint, and he could read people's souls; they wanted his blessing, they wanted to speak to him.

Just how did Father Vianney become such a success? He may not have been clever, but he knew quite well what another priest was to say of him years later, "to be a priest means to sacrifice your whole life for others for Christ's sake." Therefore, he gave *his whole day to his people*. He got up at one o'clock in the morning and prayed for a long time because he knew that work without prayer would not have lasting results. He offered Mass, he heard Confessions, and he visited the poor, the sick, and the sinners. He heard more Confessions, he preached to the people, he prayed again, and he went to bed at midnight! When did he eat? During the day, he ate a few boiled potatoes and sometimes an egg, and he had this poor meal standing up. Yet, he lived to be seventy-three, keeping up this sort of life *all day long, every day, all through the years*.

At last, it was time for Father Vianney to earn the reward of his priestly life. He knew he was soon to die and agreed to leave his hard bed of two wooden boards for a soft mattress. He also finally agreed to let his parishioners look after him, as they had always longed to do.

“It is my poor end,” he whispered with tears in his eyes. “I do not know whether I have carried out my duties well or not.”

He received the Last Sacraments and, in the very early hours of an August morning in the year 1859, he died peacefully, just as the young priest at his bedside was reading this beautiful prayer, “May the holy angels of God come to meet him, *and* lead him into the heavenly City.”

One lesson that stands out straight away in the life of Saint John Vianney is that of perseverance. See how he kept on struggling, no matter how many obstacles were placed in his path. Ultimately, his perseverance allowed him to achieve his great ambition to become a priest. We should pray to Saint John Vianney and ask him to help our own parish priests and curates in the same work he once longed to do.

The feast of Saint John Vianney is celebrated on August 9.

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